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Sen. Laura Toy announces state readies for bird flu

LANSING – The Michigan Department of Community Health will be required to establish and periodically update a pandemic influenza plan for the state under legislation signed by the governor last week, said state Senator Laura M. Toy, 6th District.

“Now is not the time to panic, it is the time to make sure your family is prepared in the event of an emergency,” Sen. Toy said. “While Hollywood often tries to play on our worst fears, the fact remains that it is very difficult to predict when and where the next public health crisis, natural disaster, or terrorist attack could occur.”

The bills signed by the governor last week require the state’s Department of Community Health to consult with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ensure the state’s pandemic influenza plan is consistent with national preparedness efforts.

According to the World Health Organization, the world is closer to another influenza pandemic now than any time since 1968, when the last of the previous century’s three pandemics occurred.

The most serious of the three pandemics in 1918 killed more than 675,000 people in the United States and more than 50 million people worldwide.

“The ‘bird flu’ as it has become known is certainly one possibility for a pandemic,” Sen. Toy said, referring to the H5N1 strain of avian influenza which has been confined primarily to birds, but has also caused human infections in Asia and Europe and has killed more than half infected.

“The common sense kinds of personal hygiene measures are still the best defense,” Sen. Toy continued. “Washing your hands frequently with soap and water, covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and staying home if you are sick are just some of the ways that you can help prevent the spread of influenza and other viruses.”

According to the Wayne County Department of Public Health, people should also completely cook poultry and eggs before consuming them, and wash their hands, kitchen surfaces, and utensils before handling other foods, including cooked meat.

For more information about the bird flu, residents can visit www.avianflu.gov, the official government website regarding pandemic influenza. For information about making sure your family is prepared in the event of an emergency, visit www.ready.gov.

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